

is the public funds for bumper stickers and attack ads. It still empowers partisan regulators to circumvent the bipartisan FEC and engage in even more intimidation of private citizens who engage in political speech. And these, of course, are just to name a few.

Now, surely, as the Senate continues to do its job and strike down misguided ideas like these, we will hear plenty from folks who consider it evidence that this body is broken. But, of course, that simply is not true. The Senate is fully capable of taking landmark, bipartisan action that makes it easier to vote and harder to cheat.

Back in 2002, I was involved, along with my colleague Chris Dodd, in passing the Help America Vote Act. I was one of the leaders on that. We empowered State and local election systems to follow commonsense guideposts for integrity and accessibility. It provided basically a grant program to States to help them upgrade their voter systems after the Florida election in 2000. And the Senate passed it 92 to 2—92 to 2.

So if our Democratic colleagues really want to find common ground and act on common sense, the roadmap is right there. But, unfortunately, we know that has never been the case.

Unfortunately, this latest “compromise” is just a repackaging of what even reporters called a messaging bill that was headed nowhere. The substance is not really changing, so neither will the result.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Also under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Margaret Irene Strickland, of New Mexico, to be United States District Judge for the District of New Mexico.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF MARGARET IRENE STRICKLAND

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today the Senate will vote on the nomination of Margaret Strickland for the U.S. District Court for the District of New Mexico.

For nearly 15 years, Ms. Strickland has served the people of New Mexico as a public defender and a civil rights attorney. With her extensive qualifications and distinguished career in public service, Ms. Strickland will make an excellent addition to the New Mexico District Court.

She began her legal career in the Law Offices of the Public Defender for the State of New Mexico, a role in which she handled nearly every type of criminal case. Over the years—and this is an amazing number—she has tried nearly 90 cases. The vast majority of her practice has been in Federal court.

Here in the Senate, Ms. Strickland boasts the strong support of her home State Senators, Senators HEINRICH and LUJÁN. Her nomination also received bipartisan support in our Judiciary Committee. She received a “well qualified” rating from the American Bar Association.

And like so many of the nominees coming from the Biden administration, she really shows professional diversity in her background. As a former public defender and civil rights attorney, she will offer a legal perspective that we often find missing from the bench. She has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to equal justice under the law, and as a judge, she will ensure that every voice is heard in the courtroom.

I urge my colleagues to support her nomination.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

On another note, Mr. President, in the coming days, this Senate has a historic decision to make and very little time to make it. We have to set aside politics, which the American people are begging us over and over to do, and we have to ensure that our government can continue to function in the midst of this public health crisis and a recovering economy. Now, in any reasonable scenario, these would be noncontroversial and nonpartisan endeavors, but sadly, at this moment in the U.S. Senate, reason is in short supply.

In recent days, some of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle have indicated that they are prepared to—listen to this—sabotage the routine process of government for political reasons. This could have a catastrophic impact on this Nation.

Last week, Senator McCONNELL reiterated that Republicans will not join Democrats in voting to deal with the debt limit. What exactly does it mean? Well, imagine if you and I just up and decided to stop paying your credit card bills. If Congress fails to raise or suspend the debt limit before the Treasury runs out of cash, our Nation runs the risk of default for the first time in history. That is why lawmakers have to set aside politics, as we have done

nearly 80 times in our history, to keep the government's bills being paid. Truthfully, this shouldn't even be a debate.

Raising or suspending the debt limit has nothing to do with any new programs or new spending. It is about paying off the tab that the government has already incurred. We are receiving the bill at the restaurant after we have had the big meal; the question is whether we will pay it.

Here is the kicker: Much of the debt that the Republicans are threatening not to pay was approved by Senate Republicans when Donald Trump was in the White House. In other words, we are being asked to approve the Trump debt from his years in the Presidency, which largely had the support of the Republicans, and the Republicans are telling us: “Hands off. We won't accept responsibility for the things we voted for during the Trump years.”

The last time Congress suspended the debt limit was in August 2019, a little over halfway through President Trump's term. Between then and the beginning of President Biden's term, congressional Republicans approved \$6 trillion in new debt. In fact, during Trump's one term in office, the national debt ballooned by 36 percent. Fiscal conservatives? During the Trump administration, the national debt ballooned by 36 percent. Well, that surely has happened before in history? No, I am sorry, it has not. That is the fastest it has grown under any President in American history. The Trump years were the biggest debt years in the history of the United States, and now the Republicans don't recognize it. They want to walk away from it.

You may be wondering: For what noble or productive purpose did the Republicans go so deep in debt during the Trump years? Well, a big chunk of it was Donald Trump's tax giveaway to the richest Americans—\$2 trillion—\$2 trillion in tax cuts for people at the superwealthy level in America. And now it is time to say to the Republicans: You voted for those tax cuts. The wealthiest people in America applauded you. Now would you at least step up and admit it?

Nope. Now that it is time for Republicans to pay for the meal that they ate, the political banquet, they are vowing instead to dine and dash. They are taking a page straight from the playbook of Donald Trump, the man who called himself proudly “the king of debt,” a man who didn't pay his own bills as a businessman and who incurred the largest increase in the national debt of any President in history. And in the process, the Republicans—to take this incredible and inexplicable stand—are willing to risk the full faith and credit of the United States.

When it comes to America's debt, default is simply not an option for any rational person. There is not a single American who will emerge unscathed if the Republicans execute this political strategy. Defaulting on our debt

threatens Social Security payments for tens of millions of Americans, it threatens healthcare coverage for tens of millions more, and it could slash benefits for our Nation's veterans. Who could be proud of that vote?

On a national global scale, default would be, in the words of Mark Zandi, Moody's chief economist, "financial Armageddon." It would send markets into free fall and threaten America's status as the world's reserve currency. Imagine that. You say to the seniors: Well, maybe/maybe not on your Social Security payments. And, incidentally, the stocks and the ETFs and the mutual funds and the investments you had for your retirement—hang on tight; they are about to take a huge hit, a hit that is totally avoidable.

Back in 2011, when House Republicans initially refused to raise the debt limit, America's credit rating was downgraded. So what? Interest rates went up, so we are paying more money in interest instead of paying it for things America values—healthcare, education, infrastructure.

Some economists believe that episode hurt consumer confidence and hobbled our economy in the great recession. It also stuck taxpayers with billions of dollars in increased borrowing costs. Think about how fragile America's economy is at this very moment. We are still recovering from a once-in-a-century public health crisis and the worst economic crisis in 75 years. The last thing we need is a self-inflicted crisis that is motivated by partisanship.

Mr. President, right now, our economy has to be our highest priority. We need to come together and get the government funded. We also have an obligation to provide financial relief to Americans who have been hit by the environmental disasters. My State escaped that, but tomorrow that may not be the case. You never know with these extreme weather events. Hurricane Ida was an eye-opener for many parts of this country. People are suffering. Disaster aid for these people is essential.

We need to also help resettle the refugees from Afghanistan. They risked their lives for Americans; we should make a home for them here in the United States.

We also want to make sure that we support our military in every way possible.

Instead of bickering and political brinksmanship, Congress needs to rise to this moment of crisis. The American people sent us to Washington not to manufacture crises but to prevent them. That is exactly why Senate Democrats are moving ahead to put President Biden's Build Back Better plan in place. Pay our debts, invest in a prosperous future—that is our plan. We would love to have Republican support for it. We have a once-in-a-century opportunity to consider working families, middle-income families, struggling families, not the wealthy.

The Build Back Better plan will grow our economy for generations to come.

If fully enacted, it will create a future for every parent to take off work to care for a newborn child. Every high school grad can receive a college education and set their sights on a good-paying job. And every senior citizen can afford prescription drugs they need without dipping into their saving. These investments will make America healthier, happier, stronger, and more prosperous.

And unlike President Trump's giveaway to the rich, President Biden's Build Back Better plan is a prudent investment in our Nation's financial future. We are going to pay for it; that is the Senate Democrats' intent. It will not be added to the deficit.

I look forward to discussing that plan in detail in the weeks to come.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senators THUNE, HEINRICH, and LUJÁN be able to complete their remarks prior to the scheduled vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there any objection?

Seeing none, without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, there has been a good discussion already on the floor this morning—I was listening to my colleague, the Democratic whip—discussing the upcoming challenges that we face this fall. We have got to fund the government, we are facing the debt limit issue, and of course the Democrats' reckless tax-and-spending-spree proposal that we will have to deal with at some point too.

The issue that has been raised is, why wouldn't Republicans want to help raise the debt limit? And I think the answer is very simple. The Democrats control the entire government here. They control the House, they control the Senate, they control the White House, and they have a procedure here in the Senate that enables them to raise the debt limit with 51 votes. They don't need a single Republican vote to raise the debt limit.

They keep arguing that, well, in the past, there have been, you know, previous times when the debt limit has been a bipartisan issue. And in most cases, those were times, of course, when there was divided government and there was actually negotiation over these issues, which there isn't right now. I mean, this tax-and-spending spree being proposed by the Democrats is the largest expansion of government as a percentage of GDP, I believe, in history—certainly going back to the 1930s.

But there is no question that this is a blowout spending bill that the Democrats have decided to do all on their own. Not a single Republican will vote for it.

And so the debt increase that would accommodate all of that additional spending—the massive amount of spending, in some cases financed with tax increases—but that is another issue, and I am going to get to that in just a minute. But the amount of debt that would be added as a result of the \$3.5 trillion the Democrats want to spend, on top of the \$2 trillion that they spent earlier this year in February—again, done all on Democrat vote; no Republicans participated in that—is a very, very different scenario than when there have been in the past attempts to actually work in a bipartisan way.

My colleague from Illinois mentioned the fact of the increase in the debt under the previous administration—what the level had been, somewhere on the order of 6 or \$6.5 trillion—and I have to remind people that 4.5 trillion of that was negotiated in response to the crisis of the pandemic. And that was a negotiation between Republicans and Democrats, where both sides sat together and said, "We have to do something; we have to react in a quick way, a bold way, to what is happening around the country," and created programs like the PPP program, which helped a lot of small businesses survive, helped with payments to healthcare providers for PPE and other costs to get them through this, money for vaccines, money for people who had been unemployed as a consequence of the pandemic. These were all costs associated with the pandemic that were negotiated in a bipartisan way, Republicans and Democrats working together.

What we have in front of us right now is the Democrats proposing the biggest expansion of government probably in the history of this country. And if you look at what they are calling \$3.5 trillion, a lot of outside groups, like the Committee for Responsible Federal Government, say it is \$5.5 trillion. Either way, it is a massive amount of spending, all of which would dramatically increase the size of the government in this country and people's dependence upon government. I call it the "free everything" bill because, essentially, that is what it is.

What I would simply suggest to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle is that if you want to spend \$3.5 trillion or \$5.5 trillion—whatever that number is—and you want to do it with 51 votes, without any discussion or negotiation or attempt to even reach out to Republicans on this, then, you ought to do it.

Republicans were in the room. They negotiated a bipartisan infrastructure bill, \$1.2 trillion, that passed here with 69 votes, and would pass overwhelmingly, I think, in the House, unless coupled with this massive spending bill, and then it would be signed into law by